

Abréviations bibliographiques

AÇO :	<i>Anadolu ve Çevresinde Ortaçağ</i>
AG :	<i>Ars Georgica</i>
AIZ :	<i>Arheologičeskie izvestiâ i zametki</i>
AnBoll :	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
AnTard :	<i>Antiquité Tardive</i>
BK :	<i>Bedi Bedi Kartlisa. Revue de kartvélologie</i>
BulMed :	<i>Bulgaria Mediaevalis</i>
Byz :	<i>Byzantion</i>
ByzF :	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
CahArch :	<i>Cahiers Archéologiques</i>
CorsiRav :	<i>Corsi di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina.</i>
CSCO :	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
DOP :	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
DZMeg :	<i>Dzeglis Megobari</i>
ECA :	<i>Eastern Christian Art</i>
IAIÂLI :	<i>Izvestiâ Abhazskogo Instituta âzyka, literatury i istorii</i>
JARCE :	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
JbAC :	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JRS :	<i>The Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSav :	<i>Journal des Savants</i>
MAK :	<i>Materialy po Arheologii Kavkaza</i>
MM :	<i>Monuments et Mémoires</i>
OC :	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
PG :	<i>Patrologia cursus completus, Series graeca, Paris, 1857–1910 (J.-P. Minge éd.)</i>
REA :	<i>Revue archéologique</i>
REArm :	<i>Revue d'études arméniennes</i>
REB :	<i>Revue d'études byzantines</i>
REGC :	<i>Revue des Etudes Géorgiennes et Caucasiennes</i>
REH :	<i>Religions et Histoire</i>
ResOr :	<i>Res Oriëntales</i>
ROC :	<i>Revue de l'Orient chrétien</i>
SabXel :	<i>Sab'ot'a xelovneba</i>
SAN GSSR :	<i>Soobščeniâ Akademii Nauk GSSR</i>
SC :	<i>Sources chrétiens</i>
SMM :	<i>Sak'art'velos muzeumis moambe</i>
SSCIS :	<i>Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo</i>
TemSig :	<i>Temporis Signa</i>
TM :	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i>

Xel : *Xelovneba*
ZKRG : *Zapiski Kavkazskogo otdela russkogo geografičeskogo obščestva*
ZNM : *Zbornik Narodnogo Muzeja*
ZVI : *Zbornik Radova Visantološkog Instituta*

Dictionnaires

DACL : *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq éd.), Paris 1924–1953, 30 vol.
LCI : *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, Rom-Freiburg-Wien, 1962–1976.
Symboles : *Dictionnaire des symboles : mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes figures, couleurs, nombres* (Jean Chevaliers, Alain Cheerbrant éd.), Paris 1982.

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Annexe

Inscriptions de stèles paléochrétiennes géorgiennes. Quelques exemples caractéristiques

1. Sur la base de la stèle de Ukangori (K'vmo K'art'li, V^e–VI^e s.)⁴²¹ :

ჰრცე ჩქი
 ღც
 ჩხ ზც ... ცნებჯტაღი
 ქსე ჯვრცაქს
 ზოცხეზც
 ჩხზც

შ(ე)წ(ე)ნითა ქ(რ)იხ(ტ)მხო/თა / ჩ(უ)ნ და ... აღხმართე / ქსე ჯვარი ხა/
 ლოცველად/ ჩ(უ)ნდა.
Avec l'aide du Christ nous avons érigé cette croix pour prier pour nous.

2. Sur les bases de deux stèles découvertes dans la vallée de la rivière de Dabluti à Dmanisi (K'vemo K'art'li, V^e–VI^e s.)⁴²² :

a.
 ჩყცზოღეც ნაღც
 ჰქ ცეცზცჯც ...
 ქსე ჯვრცაქს ცნებჯტაღი ზოცხეზც
 ჩხზც ზც ცოხს
 ზც ჰრცეცღელ ზეზც ცოხს
 ზც ზოცხეზც ჰოჯქსეზც

წყაღობითა ღ(მ)რთისა)თა/ მე აბაზამან ... / ქსე ჯვარი აღხმართე ხაღო-
 ცაღად / ჩემდა და ცოლისა / და შვლათოვს. კინც აღ(მთი)ქ(თხ)ის/ იან
 ლოცვისა მომიცხენეთ ...
*Avec la grâce de Dieu, moi Abaza, j'ai érigé cette croix pour prier pour moi et pour
 ma femme et pour mes enfants. Qui lira (cette prière) – m'évoquera dans sa prière.*

421 Šošiašvili, *Lapidaruli I*, p. 91. Paléographe N. Šošiašvili a fondé la datation sur une analyse détaillée de l'écriture. Les inscriptions sont transcritées en géorgien moderne et traduites en français pour la première fois.

422 Šošiašvili, *Lapidaruli I*, p. 92–93.

- Fig. 46 pl. 8 Église d'Içeridere. Angle sud-ouest. (Photo C. Jolivet-Lévy).
 Fig. 47 pl. 9 Église d'Içeridere. Saint Theodore terrassant le dragon. (Photo C. Jolivet-Lévy).
 Fig. 48 Église d'Içeridere. Donatrice. (Photos C. Jolivet-Lévy).
 Fig. 49-50 Église de Joisubani. Façade sud. Annonciation. Rencontre entre Marie et Elisabeth.
 Fig. 51-52 Église de Joisubani. Façade nord. Procession liturgique.
 Fig. 53 Marqueur eucharistique. Collection de la BNF (Photo B. Caseau)
 Fig. 54 Plaque du *templon* de Sxieri.
 Fig. 55 Église de Valé. Façade est. Vierge à l'Enfant avec archange et donatrice.
 Fig. 56 Église de Valé. Façade ouest.
 Fig. 57-58 Église de Valé. Portail ouest. Saints cavaliers.
 Fig. 59-60 Relief de la porte d'entrée de la façade nord. Daniel dans la fosse aux lions (Dessin T'. Xundadzé).
 Fig. 61-62 Plaque de l'église de T'elovani (Dessin T'. Xundadzé).
 Fig. 63-64 Église de Valé. Façade sud. Cavaliers.
 Fig. 65 Église de Valé. Façade sud. Donatrices.
 Fig. 66 Église de Valé. Portail de la façade est. Christ bénissant un donateur.
 Fig. 67 Plaque d'Axašeni. Donateur.
 Fig. 68 Plaque d'Axašeni. Saint Georges.
 Fig. 69 Plaque d'Axašeni. Reconstitution.
 Fig. 70 pl. 10 Relief de la façade sud de l'église d'Opiza.
 Fig. 71 pl. 11 Relief de la façade sud de l'église d'Opiza.
 Fig. 72 Église de Nikore'minda. Façade est. Transfiguration. Saints cavaliers.
 Fig. 73 pl. 12 Église de Nikore'minda. Façade est. Transfiguration. Saints cavaliers.
 Fig. 74 Église de Nikore'minda. Porte d'entrée de la façade nord.
 Fig. 75 pl. 13 Église de Nikore'minda. Tympan nord. Archanges.
 Fig. 76 Église de Nikore'minda. Fronton sud. Parousie du Christ.
 Fig. 77 Église de Nikore'minda. Tympan sud. Ascension de la croix.
 Fig. 78 Église de Nikore'minda. Fronton ouest. Christ.
 Fig. 79 Église de Nikore'minda. Tympan ouest. Christ bénit les saints cavaliers.
 Fig. 80 Église de Nikore'minda. Fronton sud. Parousie du Christ. Inscription.
 Fig. 81-82 pl. 14 Plaque d'Iq'alt'o.
 Fig. 83 pl. 15 Icône de Set'i.
 Fig. 84 pl. 16 Icône de Nakip'ari. Œuvre d'Asan, commandé par Maruši.

English Summary:

The riding saints. Cult and images in Georgia from the 4th to the 11th century

The cult of riding saints enjoyed particular diffusion in the Early Middle Ages and although the important studies have been devoted to this theme, many problems remain. The hagiographic dossier and the iconography of the riding saints have made the subject of many studies, with the most recent and comprehensive among them being that of Christopher Walter¹. Born in the territories of Asia Minor and Palestine, their veneration soon spread widely in the East and in the West and also in Georgia.

The corpus of Georgian images in the 6th-11th centuries brings together a group of monuments and religious objects. These examples hold an important position since they offer significant insight to the genesis of the cult and iconography of the riding saints and its development in Byzantium and neighboring regions. This material, as it is largely unknown, represents the important archaeological data that we have for the use of images in Late Antique and Early medieval Georgia.

4th-7th centuries

Georgian art of the early middle Ages is an artistic phenomenon whose importance goes beyond the boundaries of the country. Early Christian Georgian sculpture, the most characteristic expression of the local artistic traditions of its time, is based on a complex substrate, constituted by the Hellenistic heritage and local pagan beliefs. The early Christian archaeological findings evidence how the ancient elements and symbols, also the motifs and themes arrived from other regions, were perceived, assimilated and mixed with local traditions. They also confirm that the images of Warrior Gods were widely spread in pre-Christian times (fig. 2).

If we suggest that Christian iconography of the equestrian saints derive from Antique iconography, their outstanding popularity in Georgia, freshly converted to Christianity, can be explained by the existing beliefs. Although, the hypothesis of transformation of the pagan divinity of the Moon in Saint George, argued by some scholars basing on archeological evidence² seems plausible, however, no textual or historical source confirmed this supposition explicitly. Georgian pagan iconography reveals, in particular, that this image had already been familiar to Georgians converted to Christianity and it took an important place in their minds with no difficulty. The pagan substrate played

1 Walter, « Theodore, archetype of the warrior saint », p. 163-195 ; Walter, « Saint Theodore », p. 95-106 ; Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 44-66, with complete bibliography.

2 Clermont-Canneau, « Horus et St. Georges », p. 196-204 ; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, p. 3-4 ; Walter, *The Warrior*, p. 121-123 ; Cumont, « St. George and Mithra », p. 63-71 ; Gagošidze, *Dzelebi k'nis xeobidan*, p. 42-43 ; Van Esbroeck, « Le substrat hagiographique », p. 346-347.

a great role in the adoption of the cult of riding saints in Georgia. In other words, at the time of the emergence of the Christian cult, there was already a system of their beliefs and well-developed religious symbols, which partially absorbed the hero offered by new religion. The popular vision of a Holy rider, referring directly to the worship of a pagan hero, was maintained and reinterpreted conformation to the new religion. Substituting the veneration of ancient heroes, the veneration of equestrian saints also perfectly fitted the ideology and military vision of the « feudal » country.

The oldest hagiographic texts mentioning the martyr soldiers are dated to the 6th–7th centuries. However, this dating is uncertain and controversial³. The occurrence of military martyrs in hagiography and iconography is attributed to changes in the attitude of the Church towards the army the idea of a just war in the 6th–7th centuries at the imperial vision. Among them, Saint Theodore and Saint George were the most valuable in Georgia and elsewhere. Their worship extends to the 6th–7th centuries and the first archaeological evidence dates back to the Middle Ages.

The hagiographic tradition reflects the fact that Theodore was the most venerated saint in Byzantium: the elements of his life, already attested in the late 4th century in panegyric of Gregory of Nyssa (BHG 1760), evoking together with his traditional function of protector and victor of demons, the ability to intervene in the battles. His biography was widely developed in the hagiographic texts that ensured his Pontic origin and established his sanctuary to Euchaita. The data for Saint George are more uncertain. A palimpsest of Vienna (Cod. Vindob. Lat. 954) dated by Hippolyte Delehay from the 5th century, while Albert Ehrhard doubts between 5th–7th centuries, contains a very incomplete fragment of Saint Georges *Passion*, whose antiquity is therefore attested⁴. The historic uncertainty due to the lack of textual evidence and the fact that Saint George was not as popular as Saint Theodore in the Byzantine world at that time did not prevent the early spread of his worship: outside of the most famous places of his veneration – the Palestinian martyrion of Lydda, attested in 514, and its contemporary church of Ezra, several churches were dedicated to him, the oldest is mentioned for the first time in 518⁵. The text of *Vita* of Theodore of Sykeon written in the early 7th century in Galatia reports on the construction of a church dedicated to Saint George preserving relics of the saint, whose origin remains hypothetical⁶.

The researches of early Christian images created before iconoclasm, suggest to look for their origin in the imperial triumphal iconography of the late antiquity, where the theme of the horseman slaying a dragon or a snake is also attested⁷. Christian heroes, especially Saint George, take up a special place in the Georgians beliefs. If in Byzantium Saint Theodore was the most successful, in early Christian Georgia it was Saint George who received the privilege. The popular vision of the latter plays a significant role in understanding his particular popularity in Georgia.

3 Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 261–265 et Grotowski, *Arms and Armour*, p. 34–52 et p. 61.

4 Delehay, *Les légendes grecques*, p. 52–51; Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand*, vol. I, p. 72 Palimpsest (Cod. Vindob. lat. 954); K. Krumbacher dans *Der heilige Georg*, p. 1–3; 106–109.

5 Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 113; Howell, « S. Georges as intercessor », p. 121–136.

6 Walter, « The Origins », p. 314–315; Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 115–116.

7 Grabar, *L'empereur*; Kitzinger, « The cult of images », p. 83–150.

The first equestrian images appear in Georgia in Late Antiquity, when the pagans and oriental motifs are assimilated, reinterpreted, adopted by the new religion and harmoniously included in the new artistic repertoire⁸. They all show the mounted saints slaying a dragon. The early Christian eastern art offers several examples of the 6th–7th centuries anonymous equestrian saints, slaying the dragon, which could be considered as the oldest images of saints George or Theodore⁹. The iconography derives from the ancient tradition of magic and apotropaic amulets, widely spread from the end of antiquity in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, showing a rider, usually anonymous, but sometimes identified with Solomon or Sisinnios triumphant demonic figure¹⁰. This image – symbol of victory over evil, was rapidly diffused in the East, in the West and in the Caucasus, probably through transmission and circulation, via the pilgrimage of the small objects bearing this iconography. Therefore representation of the dragon-slayer horseman, the image that delivers the essential message of the triumph of Good over evil, was very popular in early Christian Georgia.

While mentioning of Saint Theodore's victory over the dragon appears for the first time in the 8th century texts of the life of Saint Theodore Tyron (BHG 1764)¹¹, the earliest representations of the saint on horseback slaying a dragon date back to the 5th–7th centuries and are identified with Saint Theodore – identification confirmed by an individual type of saint, established from early Christian times, and sometimes by an inscription, spelling his name. The situation is less clear for the equestrian image of Saint George. According to the general opinion¹², its representation as a dragon slayer is rarer and later. The defeated dragon is rather considered as an attribute of Theodore and not George in the early Christian era.

It is known that the veneration of equestrian saints developed particularly in the 9th century: at the time of the formation of a great and powerful monarchy in Georgia, at the end of the 9th century and especially in the 11th–13th centuries, interest in the lives of military saints increased considerably, since they served as examples of military force, heroism and courage¹³. It is precisely at that time, in the 10th century, that the first Georgian translation of the *Vitae* of the most venerated saints, George and Theodore, appear¹⁴. It is generally agreed that in this context visual and textual representations of the dragon-slayer were in a close relationship to each other¹⁵. However, some Geor-

8 Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p. 3–22; Grabar, *L'empereur*; Kitzinger, « The cult of images », p. 83–150; Brubaker, « Icons before Iconoclasm? », p. 1215–1254.

9 Walter, « Théodore Archetype », p. 163–195; Walter, « The intaglio », p. 397–414; Walter, « The Thracian Horseman », p. 657–673; Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 44–66.

10 Perdrizet, *Negotium perambulans*; Spicer, *Gems*, p. 83–84; Matantseva, « Les amulettes », p. 110–121; Dauterman-Maguire, Maguire, Duncan-Flowers, « Art and Holy Power », p. 25–28; Jolivet-Lévy, « Saint Théodore et le dragon », p. 357–382; Nesbitt, « Apotropaic devices », p. 107–113; Clédar, *Baouit*, p. 80–88; Brenk, *Tradition und Neuerung*, p. 182–185; Lewis, « Coptic Horseman », p. 27–63; Brune, *Der koptische Reiter*; Immerzel, « Divine cavalry », p. 273–276.

11 Delehay, *Les légendes grecques*, p. 11–37; Walter, « The Origins », p. 309; Auzepy, « Constantin, Théodore et le dragon », p. 325.

12 Delehay, *Les légendes grecques*, p. 11–37; Walter, « The Origins », p. 309; Thierry, « Aux limites du sacré », p. 242.

13 Kekelide, *Etiudebi*, p. 6, 80.

14 Gabidzashvili, *C'minda giorgi*; Kekelidze, *Etiudebi*.

15 Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 44–66; Pancaroglu, « Dragon-Slayer », p. 152.

gian representations of dragon-slayer equestrian saints derived from the early period, confirm the precedence of the visual tradition over the textual evidence, as has already been suggested in the case of Saint Theodore by Christopher Walter and Catherine Jolivet-Lévy on the basis of Byzantine material¹⁶.

Georgian stone-carved crosses constitute a remarkably rich and diverse corpus that despite their great diffusion in Georgia, since the 4th and particularly during the 6th–8th centuries, remain relatively unknown to non-Georgian specialists. The crosses were supported by stone-carved pillars – or *stelae* – and were raised mostly in rural places, far away from churches, presumably in order to mark a holy site where Christian rituals took place (fig. 5, 7). The absence of relevant written sources obscures the origins and purposes of this practice. However the large numbers, in which these religious monuments survive, indicate the existence in early medieval Georgia of a well-organized system involved in the production of stone crosses decorated with reliefs. Most probably, sculptural workshops functioned in various regions of country¹⁷.

The valley Xožorni (ancient Banuš-čai, K'vemo K'art'li, region in southeastern Georgia) was populated by Georgians from an old time: the archaeological evidence confirms the existence of an active life in this area already in the 1st century B.C.E.¹⁸. From this time onwards and until the 10th century, the valley counted seven important cites, among which Xožorni and Brdadzori. It is precisely in this region that a group of early Christian stone crosses, all dated approximately in the 6th century, was discovered in the 1950's.¹⁹ Three of them bear figures on horsebacks impaling a large dragon or serpent. These carved fragments indicate the existence of a sculptural workshop in the valley that was apparently active already from an early period. The fact that two of the four *stelae* bear inscriptions in Georgian confirms the Georgian origin of the monuments²⁰.

The much damaged principal side of the so-called small *stela* of Brdadzori²¹ shows a figure on horseback, aiming his spear at two coiled dragons (fig. 10). The scene is clearly divided into two parts by a narrow relief border used as a ground for the horse. The horseman, in the upper register, spears two large dragons placed on the lower part, by inserting the lance into the mouth of one of them. The monsters cover almost two quarters of the relief and are bigger than the rider himself.

A comparable image is offered by the *stela* of Xožorni²² (fig. 15–16) that repeats almost exactly the iconography of Brdadzori: it shows an equestrian saint moving from left to right, holding the lance in his right hand while his left hand holds the shield. The large coiled dragon fills the lower register of relief that is separated from the figure of a horseman on the upper part by a narrow relief border. The surviving traces of inscriptions that will be examined further below render this example particularly significant.

In these two cases (Brdadzori and Xožorni), it is obvious that the Good and the evil are clearly divided: the dragon, the incarnation of the evil, is placed at the bottom of

relief, while the triumphant over the evil dragon-slayer is raised to the highest part. This is an original iconographic system, which, to the best of my knowledge, appears only on these two monuments.

Another, better preserved example is the so-called big *stela* of Brdadzori²³ (fig. 12–13). It measures 6 meters in height and is thus the largest stone-cross preserved in Georgia. The base of *stela* remains intact with only a small part on the top missing. The main, eastern side is divided into squares bearing figural and ornamental decoration. Only thirteen are visible today. One of the squares shows the equestrian dragon-slaying saint in a similar attitude as in Xožorni. However the iconography is somehow different: the warrior aims its spear at the serpent whose tail rises up in front of his horse; he transpierces the head of the monster lying down on the horizontal border of the frame. The rider moving towards the serpent, holding, as in Xožorni, a large round shield in his left hand, the spear in his right hand is topped by a cross.

Among all almost identical iconographic elements of these three compositions, the most remarkable is the large size of the dragon – or the serpent in the case of Brdadzori. The excessively large dimensions of the dragon/serpent could be connected with the strong survival of pagan beliefs at this first stage of Christianity and could explain the particular success of this image. Indeed, according to archaeological evidence, during the 4th–6th centuries, the population of the eastern part of Šida K'art'li was not entirely and definitively converted to Christianity. Thus, besides its symbolic connotation, the image of the combat against the evil would also convey a political and religious message. Another significant element is the cross at the end of the warrior's spear on the so-called big *stela* of Brdadzori. It represents a direct indication on the nature of military saints – they were at the same time soldiers and martyrs – and becomes later the essential attribute in the iconography of Saint Theodore and Saint George. It could thus be considered as an important indication for the identification of the depicted saint that in the absence of inscription remains problematic. The fact that the big *stela* of Brdadzori and the *stela* of Xožorni present similar iconographical features and most probably were produced by the same workshop is a further indication for the saint's identification. Although there are no names inscribed, the presence of the halo in Xožorni, and the cross topping the spear in Brdadzori, would suggest an identification of the depicted figure at least with Saint Theodore, whose representation, according to common belief, appeared in the Christian East well before those of Saint George, already in the 6th–7th centuries²⁴.

The case of Xožorni, however enables us to put forward another, more concrete hypothesis concerning the identification of the saint (fig. 16). The inscription is much damaged, but a readable part on the small relief border at the leg of the horse names the dragon: ლ Ⴀ Ⴁ Ⴂ Ⴃ Ⴄ Ⴅ Ⴇ Ⴈ Ⴉ Ⴊ Ⴋ Ⴌ Ⴍ Ⴎ Ⴏ Ⴐ Ⴑ Ⴒ Ⴓ Ⴔ Ⴕ Ⴖ Ⴗ Ⴘ Ⴙ Ⴚ Ⴛ Ⴜ Ⴝ Ⴞ Ⴟ (this is a dragon). Some letters can also be discerned on both sides of the rider's head: Ⴐ Ⴑ (rg) to the left and Ⴒ Ⴓ (i) to the right²⁵, and allow the reconstitution of the name of Georges: (Ⴒ Ⴓ Ⴔ Ⴕ Ⴖ Ⴗ Ⴘ Ⴙ Ⴚ Ⴛ Ⴜ Ⴝ Ⴞ Ⴟ) (Giorgi in Georgian). According to this reading, the inscription identifies the figure with Saint George, a fact that is

16 Walter, « Saint Theodore », p. 95–106 ; Jolivet-Lévy, « Saint Theodore et le dragon », p. 357–382.

17 Javakšvili, *Adrep'eodaluri*; Mačabeli, *K'vamebi*.

18 Kitišvili, « C'op'i », p. 85.

19 Gagošidze, « Xožornis k'vasvetebi », p. 60–71.

20 For the inscriptions see : Gagošidze, « Xožornis k'vasvetebi », p. 70.

21 Čubinašvili, *Xandisi*, p. 8 ; Javakšvili, *Adrep'eodaluri*, p. 33–34.

22 Privalova, *P'avnisi*, p. 2 ; Gagošidze, « C'minda giorgis », p. 26.

23 Čubinašvili, *Xandisi*, p. 8 ; Javakšvili, *Adrep'eodaluri*, p. 33–34.

24 Walter, « Saint Theodore », p. 95–106 ; Jolivet-Lévy, « Saint Theodore et le dragon », p. 357–382.

25 Privalova, *P'avnisi*, p. 64 ; Sošiašvili, *Lapidaruli*, p. 230. In spite of this inscription, Nicole Thierry identifies this warrior saint, as well as that of the small *stela* of Brdadzori, as Saint Theodore : Thierry, « Aux limites du sacré », p. 236.

in accordance with the iconographic type of the depicted saint, who bears the typical physical characteristics of Saint George that is his curly hair and absence of a beard. This identification would make the Xožorni *stele* one of the earliest example of Saint George as a dragon-slayer, a motif that in Byzantine art does not occur until the 11th century.

The identification of the warrior saint of Xožorni with Saint George killing the dragon, leads us to consider two main problems. First, the dating in the 11th century of the earliest written sources, referring to Saint George as a dragon-slayer and consequently the origin of this composition; Second, the particular success that enjoyed in Georgia the image of saint George killing a male figure instead of the dragon. Scholars agree that early unnamed pictures of a saint killing a dragon should not be identified with Saint George, who was at first represented killing a man²⁶. Starting from the latter, medieval Georgian art offers indeed many examples of representations of Saint George killing Diocletian. The iconographic theme of the saint combating the dragon made its appearance much later, in the 11th century and mostly in wall-paintings (Hadiši [11th c.], Boč'orma [12th c.], P'avnisi [12th–13th c.])²⁷. It forms part of the miraculous rescuing by the saint of a princess in the city of Lasia, first attested in an 11th century manuscript preserved in the Greek patriarchal library in Jerusalem cod. 2²⁸.

However, it should be noted that the oldest images of the saint killing the dragon cannot be considered as illustration of the life of Saint George, since they do not reproduce the narrative of the *vita*. According to the latter, Saint George defeated the dragon miraculously, only with the force of his prayer, and killed it with his sword with no fight²⁹. On the contrary, early Christian stone crosses depict the combat of the saint with the creature, attributing precise semantic importance to each element of the composition.

An episode of the victory over the dragon included in the life of Saint Theodore Tiron, dated as early as the 8th century³⁰, indicates that the idea of this battle can be counted among the heroic acts of almost all popular military saints and seems to derive from older symbolic representations. Thus, the representation of Saint George or any other saint as a dragon killer in Georgia must be considered as a purely symbolical representation.

Further archaeological evidence confirms the particular popularity of Saint George in early Christian Georgia: according to Niko Čubinashvili and Kiti Mačabeli, the representation of the 6th century Xandisi *stele* (fig. 24) could attest to his early cult in Georgia. This image shows a martyr saint – not a military one – identified by these scholars with Saint George³¹. According to René Šmerling, another representation of Saint George can be found on one of the pillars of the 8th century Gveldes *temple* (fig. 25): the relief shows the saint standing, and not as a horse rider, spearing a long serpent with

26 Walter, « The Origins », p. 320.

27 Ševakova, *Monumental'naâ živopis'*, tab. 92–94; Q'enia, « Lag'ami », p. 38–39; Privalova, *P'avnisi*, p. 18, fig. 4–5.

28 Blake, « Catalogue », p. 17.

29 Blake, « Catalogue », p. 17; Privalova, *P'avnisi*, p. 73; Walter, « The Origins », p. 320–322.

30 Zuckerman, « The Reign of Constantine V », p. 191–210; Walter, « Theodore, Archetype », p. 166–168; Auzepy, « Constantin, Théodore et le dragon », p. 324–326.

31 Čubinashvili, *Xandisi*, p. 4; Mačabeli, *K'vajvarebi*, p. 51.

a lance topped by a cross. However, in the absence of inscriptions, this identification remains tentative.

Instead, the 7th century *stele* from Kataula (fig. 26) carries an interesting inscription: the representation of a woman, certainly a donor, is accompanied by an invocation in *asomtavruli* script: *Saint George, have mercy upon your slave*³². This inscription, which was undoubtedly chosen for apotropaic and devotional reasons, confirms the particular esteem and respect that enjoyed Saint George in Georgia, while underlining the existence of his cult already in the 7th century.

The above mentioned evidence leads us to suppose that the image of the dragon-slaying Saint George was created in Georgia well before the relevant written version on the basis of ancient, pre-Christian cults of the Holy Rider (so-called warrior God); and the old legends related to Saint George certainly formed a part of the oral tradition that circulated at Early Christian time and could have influenced the text of the saint's life in more developed and narrative form. Consequently, we can consider that the iconography of the miracle of Saint George with the dragon in the city of Lasia created in the 11th century according to the life of Saint George and soon spread widely in medieval Georgian painting was inspired by this kind of representations. The early images of the dragon-slayer horseman in Georgia allow incorporating Georgia in the circle of countries that contributed to the creation of Christian iconography in Late Antiquity.

9th–11th centuries

The Arab conquests and the rise of Islam in the 7th–8th centuries did not stop the development of spiritual and cultural life in Georgia³³. However, the 8th century appears to be a rather difficult period and scholars hesitate to propose it as unique dating for monuments. After that kind of documentary vacuum lasting from the 8th up to the early 9th century, the art production resumes, together with close relations with Byzantine Empire. Riding saints reappear.

The unusual symbolic expressiveness of Georgian artists could be explained by the circumstance that Georgian Christian art was created upon local ground and with the ancient pre-Christian national cultural heritage at its disposal. However, it is an established fact that Georgia enjoyed close cultural and spiritual relations with Syria and Palestine at an early time, also with Constantinople – in the medieval period. The reason for this traditional classification is well known: the Georgian church followed the liturgical practice of Jerusalem from the very beginning of its existence up to the end of the 10th century³⁴ and adopted Byzantine liturgical practice after this date. The ancient and prolonged contacts of the country with the spiritual and artistic centres of Byzantium played an important role in the formation of Georgian art. The change mainly appeared in Georgian ecclesiastical literature, encouraging the diversity of the contents of manu-

32 Mačabeli, *K'vajvarebi*, p. 166–176.

33 Javakšvili, *Istoria*, vol 2, p. 93–116; Martin-Hisard, « Les Arabes en Géorgie », p. 105–138; Martin-Hisard, « L'Aristocratie géorgienne », p. 13–34.

34 Kekelidze, *Kanonar'*; *The New Fnds*, p. 368–369.

scripts and their thematic varieties³⁵, also in visual art, especially in wall painting, adopting the system of decoration of Byzantine churches and iconography.

The quality and number of relevant surviving representations from the period of 9th–11th century confirm that the popularity of the equestrian saints increased in Georgia after the Early Christian era. The frequent use of the image of the riding warrior saints slaying an enemy, join therefore the early Christian tradition. However, this popularity was accompanied by the creation of a different iconography transmitting however, the same idea of defeat of the Evil, with additional defensive and apotropaic power: the representation of equestrian saints facing each other, with Saint Theodore impaling a serpent, and Saint George killing a male figure. In the 9th–11th centuries, only saints George and Theodore appear on horseback in Georgia; no other saint is attested. Georgian translations of the *Life* and *Passion* of saints, which already existed in several versions, have certainly contributed to illustrate, communicate and diffuse their images³⁶.

The representation of equestrian warriors, facing each other, established in the early 10th century, particularly widespread in medieval Georgia and adopted by Christian East, has a very long tradition³⁷. However among early Christian Georgian images, derived from the battle scenes of Greco-Roman art and emphasizing the idea of triumph, none presents a similar pattern. In this famous iconography, wide spread also in neighboring Cappadocia, the most specific detail is certainly the representation of the enemy defeated by Saint George; if medieval Cappadocia, particularly rich in similar images, resents one or more dragons, in Georgia, the equestrian saints are killing different enemies: Saint Theodore slays a dragon, while Saint George hits a human figure, identified as his persecutor, King Diocletian, often without his name being mentioned.

The theme of victory of hero over a man is well-known from the ancient time. The earliest representations come from the Near East, where the victorious kings trampling their enemies which symbolize the general image of a conquered foreign people, as it is often the case on the reliefs of Mesopotamia, Babylon, Akkad or Egypt. The Georgian images seem particularly close to those known and developed in Sasanian art – the monumental rock “investiture reliefs”, mostly date back to between the 3rd and beginning of the 4th centuries, showing the mounted kings offered the diadem by a God³⁸. This idea of victory over a man was adopted by Christian art as a manifestation of the power of a sovereign and took a different symbolic meaning in Christian iconography where the saint, military or martyr, defeats not a personal adversary but the enemy of all Christians. The defeat of tyrants and persecutors of Christianity was one of the functions of the military saints; in this context, the kings, persecutors of the Christians then become symbols of paganism and Satan / Hell³⁹. Taking into consideration the fact that Georgian Early Christian art was inspired by the Sassanid culture, assimilating many elements of its art, we can suppose that the Georgian iconography has been cre-

35 *The New Finds*, p. 368–369.

36 Privalova, *P'avnisi*, p. 65–66; Čubinašvili, *Gruzinskoe čekanno*, p. 450–477.

37 Grabar, *Les voies de la création*, p. 48–49, fig. 42–47; Walter, « The Thracian Horseman » p. 661–663; Walter, « The Origins of the Cult of Saint George », p. 295–326; Walter, « The Triumph of Saint Peter », p. 32–33.

38 *Splendeur des Sassanides*, p. 71–94; *Les Perses sassanides*, p. 38, fig. 3; p. 187, fig. 3; p. 89, p. 94.

39 Walter cites the Greek manuscript Vatican. 1679, where the text begins with the mention of a tyrant king and representation is accompanied by the image of a snake. Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 53.

ated under the Sassanid influence, or that one intended to revive an ancient tradition of anonymous mounted hero triumphing over the evil presented in an anthropomorphic form. However, no representation of this type is attested in Late Antiquity when only mounted saints slaying a dragon or a snake appear. The human enemy appears together with a new image of equestrian saints facing each other. This iconography refers directly to the Coptic manuscripts of the 9th–13th centuries, where however, not always the same warrior is depicted and the image of the enemy often changes⁴⁰. Although Coptic examples suggest the common source of inspiration, the Georgian art of Georgia insists on a perfectly stable iconography with only Saint George and Diocletian.

David Howell reported that Diocletian was mentioned for the first time in connection with Saint George in 7th century text, attributed to Saint Andrew, Bishop of Crete, which, according to the author, could be a simple attempt to give to the legend a certain historical realism⁴¹. Referring to the same source, Lucy-Anne Hunt, suggests that the association of Diocletian to Saint George is rather Byzantine than Georgian tradition⁴². However the Byzantine iconography does not confirm this suggestion. It seems that the image of Saint George killing a man, in some cases explicitly identified with Diocletian, which seems to be characteristic of a medieval Georgia, does not precede the text, but it supposes to know the *Passion* of Saint Georges BHG 671–672 (or one of its previous versions, known by Andrew of Crete) which according to the Euthymius the Hagiorite (953–1028), founder of the Georgian Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos, is the only read in Georgian churches⁴³. It is therefore plausible to suppose that the choice of the saint and the presence of Diocletian, as a symbol of incredulity, is a local tradition which follows the Georgian text. Moreover, in the Georgian translations of the *Life* of Saint George, he is called *Christianity* and Diocletian is explicitly named as the *Dragon of Hell* (ჰეღაბი in Georgian)⁴⁴.

The comparison of Diocletian to a *Dragon of Hell* in the Georgian versions of the *Vita* of Saint George, and the date of its earliest translations – 10th century – corresponds to the appearance of the image faced mounted saints, also inspired by the perpetual wars in which Georgia was involved at that time. It is thus possible that the symbol of Evil was transformed into a human enemy under the influence of these texts and the real political situation of the country, becoming an indispensable element for Saint George's iconography. Furthermore, this image of defeated enemy changes the face from the 10th

40 Two of them : Folio 287 of the manuscript *Copte 66* of the Apostolic Vatican Library (9th–10th c.), and from the British Museum, (OR. 6801) (9th–10th c.), shows an equestrian portrait of Saint Mercury pierces with his lance a bearded old man appeared at the feet of his horse and designated by an inscription as Julian the Apostate. Another riding saint, named as the saint Apa Theodoros the Anatolian, the manuscript Pierpont Morgan Library of New York (M. 613) (early 10th c.), plant the spear topped by the cross in the body of a snake with a human head, described as demonic by an inscription: Leroy, *Les manuscrits coptes*, p. 185–189, pl. 105,2, pl. 106,1 et 107,2; Bolman, *Monastic Visions*, p. 44–45, fig. 4.12–4.13; p. 61, fig. 4.26.

41 Howell, « S. Georges as intersessor », p. 122, n. 1.

42 Hunt, « Christian Art in Greater Syria and Egypt », p. 17 et p. 32, n. 39; Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine*, B 434, pl. XXIX, XCVII–XCVIII; B 49, pl. XXXI, CIV.

43 He writes this in his letter to the monk of Č'q'odidi, George (Giorgi Č'q'ondideli) asking about the apocryphal books whose reading is prohibited in the Church. See Georgian text in p. 76.

44 Manuscripts Ath.-8 (X^e s.), fol. 259–267; Sin.-62 (X^e s.), fol. 29–38; H-535, fol. 126–139. See: Sabibin, *Sak'art'velos salot'xe*, p. 82–86; Gabidzašvili, *C'minda giorgi*, p. 50.

century: it becomes Byzantine Emperor, wearing the imperial dress and the Byzantine crown. On the Iq'alt'o relief (10th c.) (fig. 81–82), the enemy killed by Saint George and explicitly named as Diocletian by an inscription, carries the Byzantine crown. The most characteristic examples are offered by metal icons from Svanet'i region, Set'i (fig. 83), and Nakip'ari, executed by Asan and ordered by Marusi (fig. 84), both dated 10th–11th centuries. They show a traditional image of Saint George killing a man, wearing a dress of Byzantine emperor and a crown. On the icon ordered by Marusi, the Byzantine emperor is named by an *asomt'avruli* inscription as *Diocletian king incredulous* *ԾԴՈՒՆԵԼՄ ԸՏԻ ԶԴՄԻ ՕՄՃՈՆՈՉ* (დიოდლეტი/ანე მეფე უმჯუღლო). This iconography is directly related to the history of country and proves that the image of the enemy changes according to political events. After the complications of the relations between Georgia and Byzantium in the late 10th century, it receipts the "look" of a concrete political rival, reflecting the real political situation. The iconography reveals a didactic intention of the creators: this image supposed to encourage the viewers during the war against an enemy; it carries out the ideological message⁴⁵.

In the rich imagery of Georgian sculpture of the 9th–11th centuries, the theme of victory of equestrian saints appears as one of the most recurrent and is characterized by an original interpretation. The archaeological evidence of this epoch attests that Georgian art follows the traditional iconography, adding however different elements on typical general scheme.

One of the reliefs on the western façade of the Martvili church (10th c ?) (Č'q'ondidi, Western Georgia) shows George and Theodore on horseback, killing together a double-headed dragon (fig. 28–33, pl. 3). The triumphal character of the representation is emphasized by two flying angels glorifying the saints by holding a crown – the unusual detail medieval Georgia and generally characteristic for early Christian time. According to Georgian scholars, these reliefs can be dated to the 7th century and the image of Georges and Theodore killing a dragon provides the earliest example of this type⁴⁶. This opinion has been contested by Russian and European scholars, who move forward the dating of the church architecture, as well as of its reliefs towards the 10th century⁴⁷. The resemblance of the Martvili relief to the plaque from the Benaki Museum was mentioned as a supplementary argument for a late dating⁴⁸. The plaque of the church Amasia in Pontus is dated by the 10th–11th centuries, although its execution may suggest a later date (13th century ?). The image of equestrian saints facing each other and slaying with their spears a man placed at the feet of their horses seem to be a suitable parallel: the attitude and the costumes of riders, details of horses harness are comparable to what we see on Martvili relief. But this iconography is very unusual for Georgia where the Saints

45 Metreveli, *Sak'art'velos mepeebi*, p. 18–19.

46 This dating is based on the presence of antique sculptural forms in the style of reliefs and on the early iconography: Aladašvili, *Monumental'naa skulptura*, p. 48–56.

47 This later chronology derives from a different dating of the construction of the church, the style of the figures *en bloc*, the late iconography with the facing saints and of the type of the horses' harness, notably the presence of stirrups: Hruškova, *Skulptura*, p. 59; Vagner, « Obraz voina-vsadnika », p. 4; Thierry, « Aux limites du sacré », p. 240, n. 40; Walter, *The Warrior Saints*, p. 129. Christopher Walter indicates the date 912–957.

48 Pancaroglu, « Dragon-Slay », p. 154; Delivorrias, *Benaki Museum*, p. 65, p. 69.

George and Theodore never kill a man together. It is related to Cappadocia, which offers a number of its examples⁴⁹. The image from Benaki attests the use of the same prototypes but seems to have been created under the influence of different models: the « Cappadocian » dragon is replaced here by a « Georgian » man.

The image on the right, on the same façade shows another horseman hitting with his long and massive spear a man at the feet of his horse (fig. 30). The presence of the latter – inseparable element of Saint George's iconography – allows the identification of the scene to the traditional image of Saint George killing Diocletian and follows the general scheme, well established from the 10th century⁵⁰. Suggesting the dating to the 10th century, we must admit that the relief was executed by a not very qualified artist, using archaic prototypes.

The complex imagery of the enigmatic plaques of the C'ebelda *templon* (Abxazia) containing mostly of scenes from the Old and New Testament was interpreted in different manners and their dating approximates between the 6th and the 12th centuries⁵¹. One of the panels bears the traditional representation of two facing equestrian saints, George and Theodore, spearing Diocletian and a dragon respectively (fig. 36). Actually, the style of the reliefs, as well as their complex iconography, does not have any exact parallels. The stylistic particularity and the complexity of the iconographic program can, undoubtedly, be explained by the use of various models, or by the involvement of several artists⁵². The image of riding saints is the largest among all the representations and reproduces the so called "investiture scene" of Sassanid kings, where a God grants a crown a new sovereign (cf. investiture of Ardashir I to Naqsh-e Rostam)⁵³. Saint George, on the right, still preserves the crown giving gesture, but without the crown, making it a meaningless; the gesture of the Theodore is also out of context, since it seems to bend a bow, the attitude of Sasanian hunting or combat scenes. This same rider is dressed as a Sassanid king, his headgear is not clearly visible, but it looks like *korymbos* – an inseparable part of the Sassanid royal crowns. The long sword and the way it is being carried, the horse with the tied tail and harnessing are also of Sassanid type, as well as the bearded faces with their characteristic features. Under the horses appear victims: under the left a dragon, on the left a man on the right, that recalling the sovereign defeated by the Sassanid kings, in our case, identified as Diocletian. These Sassanid type heroes are presented as victorious guards of sanctuary and the meaning of this image corresponds to their location on the *templon* on the edge of the apse.

Another interesting and less known example can be found on the eastern facade of the 10th century Joisubani church (Rač'a, Western Georgia) (fig. 37–40, 42–44, 49–52, pl. 4–7). The equestrian saints George killing Diocletian and Theodore slaying a dragon, are integrated in a very complex iconographic program as parts of one of the oldest representations of the Last Judgment: they are shown together with the Christ-Judge,

49 In Pürenli seki kilise (9th–10th c.), Yılanlı kilise / Göreme no. 28 (11th c.) Saklı kilise / Göreme no. 2a (11th c.) in the Ihlara valley: Thierry, « Aux limites du sacré », p. 234–236, fig. 1; Jolivet-Lévy, « Saint Théodore », p. 358–359.

50 It refers directly to the 9th–11th century's Coptic images, offering comparable examples showing defeated man, see: note 42.

51 Khroushkova, *Abkhazie IV–XIV^e siècles*, p. 145–153; Thierry, « Le culte du cerf », p. 80–84.

52 Iamandzé, *Les installations liturgiques*, p. 128.

53 *Splendeur des Sassanides*, p. 76, fig. 59.

the figure of the donor and the archangels, surrounded by inscriptions and invocations, highlighting the devotional use of this image. Together with apotropaic function and role of intercessors, the saints, George and Theodore, embody here the victory over evil by the power of faith. The symbolic significance of this representation becomes clear by its inclusion in the program: it demonstrates close links between the sacrifice of Christ and those who have followed his example and appears as a paradigm for the delivery of the soul through faith and sacrifice.

The devotional use of the images united by the idea of salvation and intercession is also stressed in Vale church decoration (Samcxe-Javaxet'i, Southern Georgia) (fig. 55–60, 63–66). The representation of donors in supplication before Christ and Virgin appears here twice. Alongside this theme, the Old Testament also plays an important role in the program and the representation of the miraculous deliverance of the prophet Daniel fits perfectly in this context. The symbolic meaning of the resurrection and salvation is crowned by the principal image of the victory of equestrian saints George and Theodor killing successively Diocletian and dragon.

The relief of Axašeni church (10th c.) (Samcxe-Javaxet'i, Southern Georgia) presents two typical scenes: a donor stretching out his hands with a model of a church to Saint George on horseback, who kills with his lance a man (fig. 67–69). An *asomt'avruli* inscription explicitly names Saint George, a donor presented with his offering – Nig'varay – and his father – Saurmag, both mentioned in a prayer addressed to Christ, to express and reinforce not only their own faith but also their prerogative within society: *Christ have mercy Nig'varay son of Saurmag. Saint Georges*. The originality of these images lies in their union in the same composition and on the same plate. Although the association of the donors to saints, George or Theodore, is not unusual for Byzantine art⁵⁴, in our knowledge, none of byzantine images, shows in such an explicit manner a donor addressing directly to saint George slaying an enemy, and offering him a gift. Here again the Axašeni artist particularly emphasizes the apotropaic function of the representation and the role of Saint George as an intercessor.

The equestrian Saints, Georges and Theodore, appear twice in Nikore'monda church (early 11th c.) (Rač'a, Western Georgia) (fig. 72, 79). The complex program of church decoration glorify the Christ through the image of the Ascension of the Cross, in southern tympanum (fig. 77), and associate this theme to his Second Coming, presenting the scenes of Christ the Judge, Transfiguration and the last Judgment on the church facades (fig. 78, 76, 73). The first traditional image of faced mounted saints is associated to the idea of Judgment, where, as in the church of Joisubani, they act to show the way to victory and mercy through the tribulation. It appears again on the western tympanum and repeats the previous pattern, except one detail: between faced mounted saints the Christ is represented, standing on a pedestal and blessing the heroes. The image intends to protect the church entrance and to stress the idea of the salvation through faith and sacrifice. It is closely related to another one, that can be found on the 10th century plaque discovered in the basilica of Saint Step'ane in the Iq'alt'o monastery (early 11th c.)⁵⁵ (Kaxet'i, Eastern Georgia) (fig. 81–82). Its decoration consists of a composite program of images which, as in most religious works, expresses the Glory of Christ by under-

lining the theme of His Sacrifice by focusing on Incarnation and Redemption. Part of this programme is also the representation of equestrian saints identified by inscriptions: Saint Theodore, on the left, spears the dragon, while Saint George, on the right, kills Diocletian named by the inscription. The idea of triumph is particularly stressed by a medallion containing the bust of the Christ blessing the saints and especially by the important scale of the riders and their privileged location, almost in the middle of the plaque, near the Crucifixion of Christ. This arrangement certainly aims to emphasize the apotropaic function of the image, illustrating at the same time the victory of the Christian soldiers over the evil and enjoying for its purpose the protection of the object and its users.

The facades of Georgian churches of 5th–7th centuries follow the Eastern traditions and offer, mainly on the entrances of the church, the scenes of Ascension and glorification of Christ and the Virgin. This well established tradition continues latter on, when a special attention is still given to the main (western) entrance door and also to the sanctuary window. It is precisely in these places that the riding saints appear from the 9th century. The church door, the solemn entrance into the divine universe leading to paradise, take therefore an important part in Georgian religious architecture and is reserved for the images with apotropaic function, especially those of equestrian saints, playing the role of guards and protectors of the holy place, together with the archangels. This apotropaic function may apply to the protection of entrances of Martvili, Valé and Nik'oreminda churches. The creators of Joisubani reliefs give an advantage to the sanctuary window, introducing the riding saints in the cycle of the Last Judgement. Even if they are included in the Christological cycle, they still enjoy a significant place, as it is the case on Iq'alt'o plate, where the equestrian Saints George and Theodore appear on the upper register and beside the Crucifixion.

Although Georgian images of the equestrian saints Georges and Theodore follow a classic and well-established scheme, their inclusion in complex programmes confers multiple functions and a special meaning to this representation which goes well beyond simple iconographic definition. The eschatological significance is dominant in the programmes of Joisubani and Nikore'minda churches. The Georgian examples join here the Cappadocian tradition, in particular, the Joisubani church which shows a special affinity with Içeridere church wall painting (fig. 46–48, pl. 8–9), dated on second half of the 10th century⁵⁶, confirming, at the same time, the early occurrence of the Last Judgment scene both in Georgian and Cappadocian art. Even if the program does not explicitly refer to the Last Judgment, the eschatological theme and the idea of the salvation are constantly present and related to the image of warrior saints. It is the case of Axašeni church relief, the concern of the salvation and fear of punishment and judgment are expressed by the association of a donor offering a gift – the Church that he probably built himself – to the victorious image of Saint George killing a Diocletian. Highlighting the role of intercessor of equestrian saint, this example, together with C'ebelda and Iq'alto reliefs, introduces another main issue, next to the eschatological interpretation: they attest that the image of holy riders, considered as mediators *par excellence*, were intended to pro-

54 Thierry, *Nouvelles églises*, p. 201–213, n. 2; Jolivet-Lévy, *La Cappadoce médiévale*, p. 344–345.

55 Iamandzé, *Les installations liturgiques*, p. 61–94.

56 Jolivet-Lévy, « Nouvelles données », p. 73–86.

test the faithfulness and obtain the mercy for their sins and therefore clearly reveal the use of this image in the devotional context.

Forming an integral part of complex programs, Georgian images appear as purely iconic representations, glorifying esteemed heroes and the image of the defeated enemy makes their triumph particularly explicit. Inclusion of some details in these scenes, like blessing Christ or donor images with invocations, confirms their iconic nature: the analogous details are frequently used in metal icons, where they often complete the representation of Saint George standing, (for example, on Sxieri or Boë'orma metal icons, both from the 11th century). The independence of these iconic representations from the earliest surviving narrative of the dragon episode in the town of *Lasia*, known from the 11th century Georgian text of *Vita* of Saint George, seems apparent: any of these images shows Saint George with the princess and this fact suggests that they do not illustrate this miracle. Moreover, in the 11th-century church of Hadiši and the 12th-century Boë'orma church, the traditional representation of equestrian saints Theodore and George appear together with the scene of the miracle in *Lasia*, a fact that proves the autonomy of each composition⁵⁷.

The images of equestrian saints produced in Georgia in the 6th–11th centuries, shed a new light on significant aspects of Georgian artistic tradition and cultural integration. They will also help to better understand the process of evolution of religious beliefs at that time. Georgian monuments complete the data provided by other regions of the Eastern Christian world and contribute to our understanding of the artistic developments of a wider Eastern world encompassing Byzantium and the Islamic Near East.

This study also leads to new questions and perspectives to complete the image of equestrian saints in medieval Georgian society, by extending the chronological span and taking into consideration other types of textual and archaeological sources. The medieval Georgian wall painting is particularly important, where the long cycles illustrate their *Life* and *Passion*, raising a problem of the choice of episodes or the relationship between liturgical space and church decoration. This route of research should be pursued in the future.

57 Privalova, *P'acnisi*, p. 76–77.



Fig. 2. Bague sceau du trésor de Vani.



Fig. 13. Grande stèle de Brdadzori. Saint cavalier terrassant le serpent.



Fig. 25. Pilier du templon de Gveldes. Saint Théodore (?).



Fig. 32. Église de Martvili. Façade ouest. Saints cavaliers. Ascension du Christ.



Fig. 37. Reliefs de l'église de Joisubani. Fenêtre de la façade est.



Fig. 38. Église de Joisubani. Jugement Dernier. Christ et apôtres.



Fig. 40. Église de Joisubani. Jugement Dernier. Archange Gabriel et donateur.



Fig. 42. Église de Joisubani. Façade est. Saint Theodore.

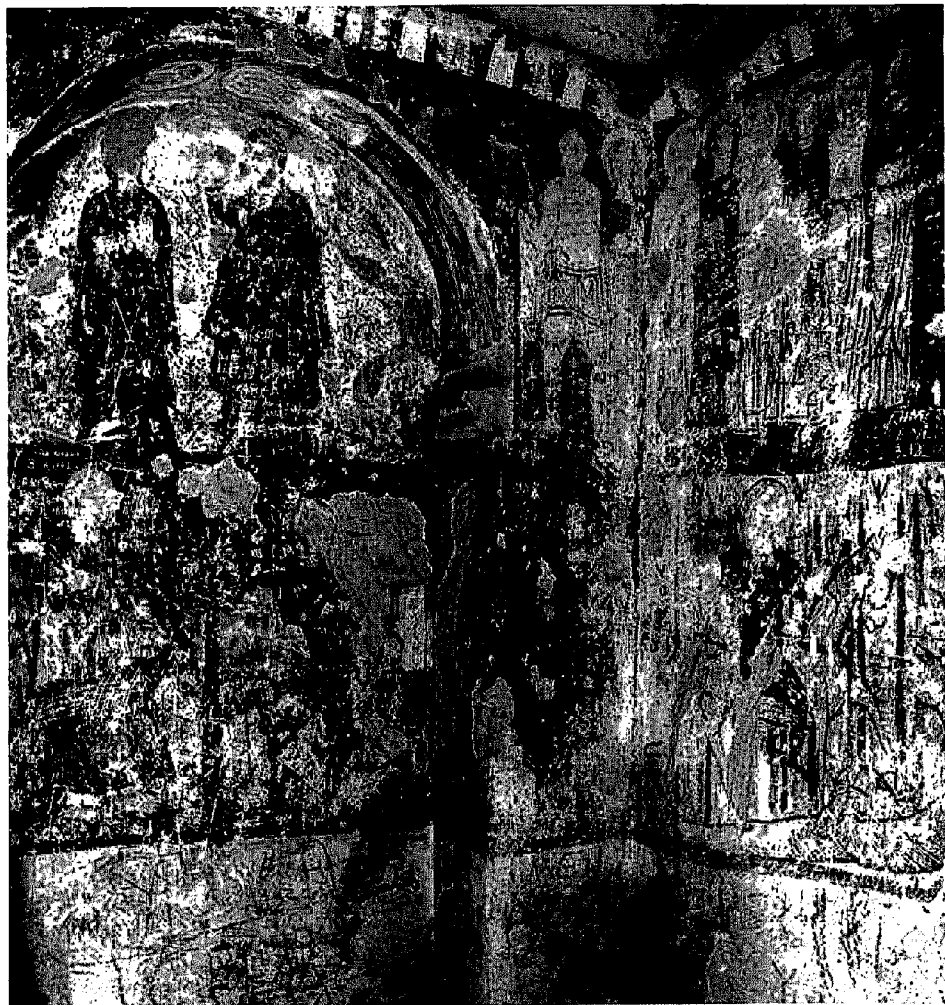


Fig. 46. Église d'Içeridere. Angle sud-ouest. (Photo C. Jolivet-Lévy).



Fig. 47. Église d'Içeridere. Saint Theodore terrassant le dragon. (Photo C. Jolivet-Lévy).

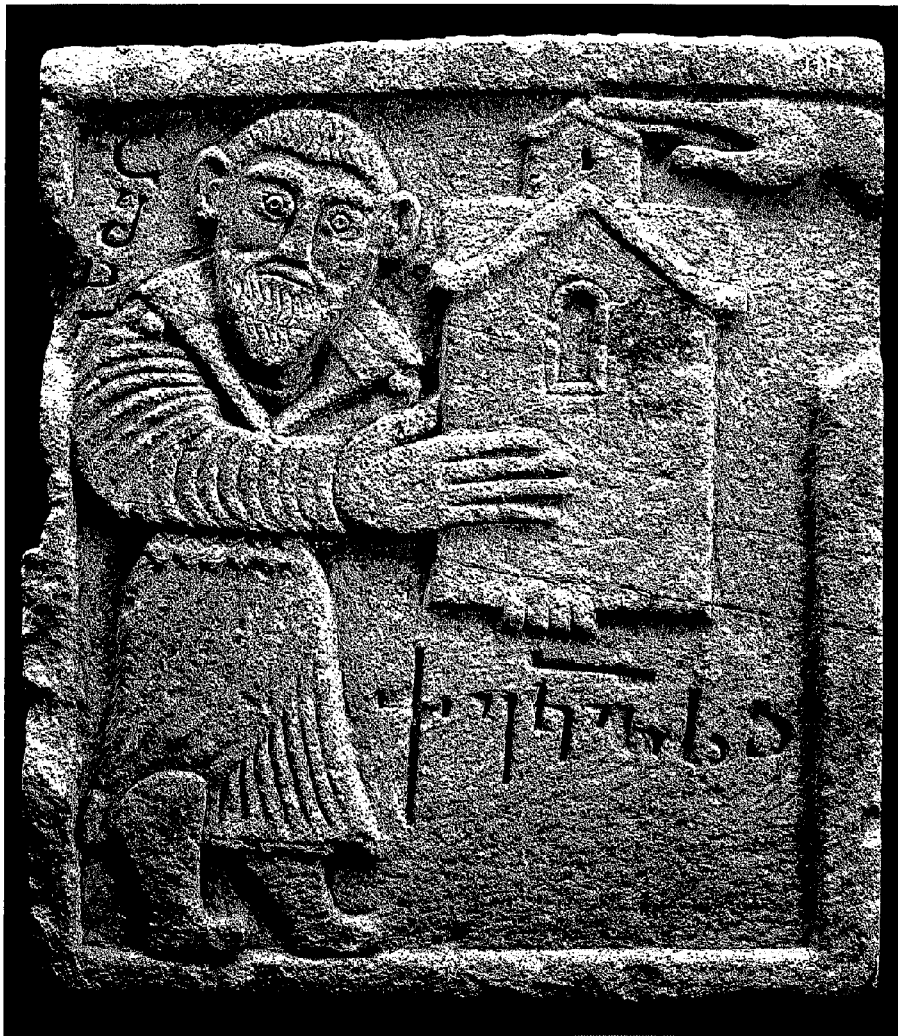


Fig. 70. Relief de la façade sud de l'église d'Opiza.



Fig. 71. Relief de la façade sud de l'église d'Opiza.



Fig. 73. Église de Nikor'minda. Façade est. Transfiguration. Saints cavaliers.

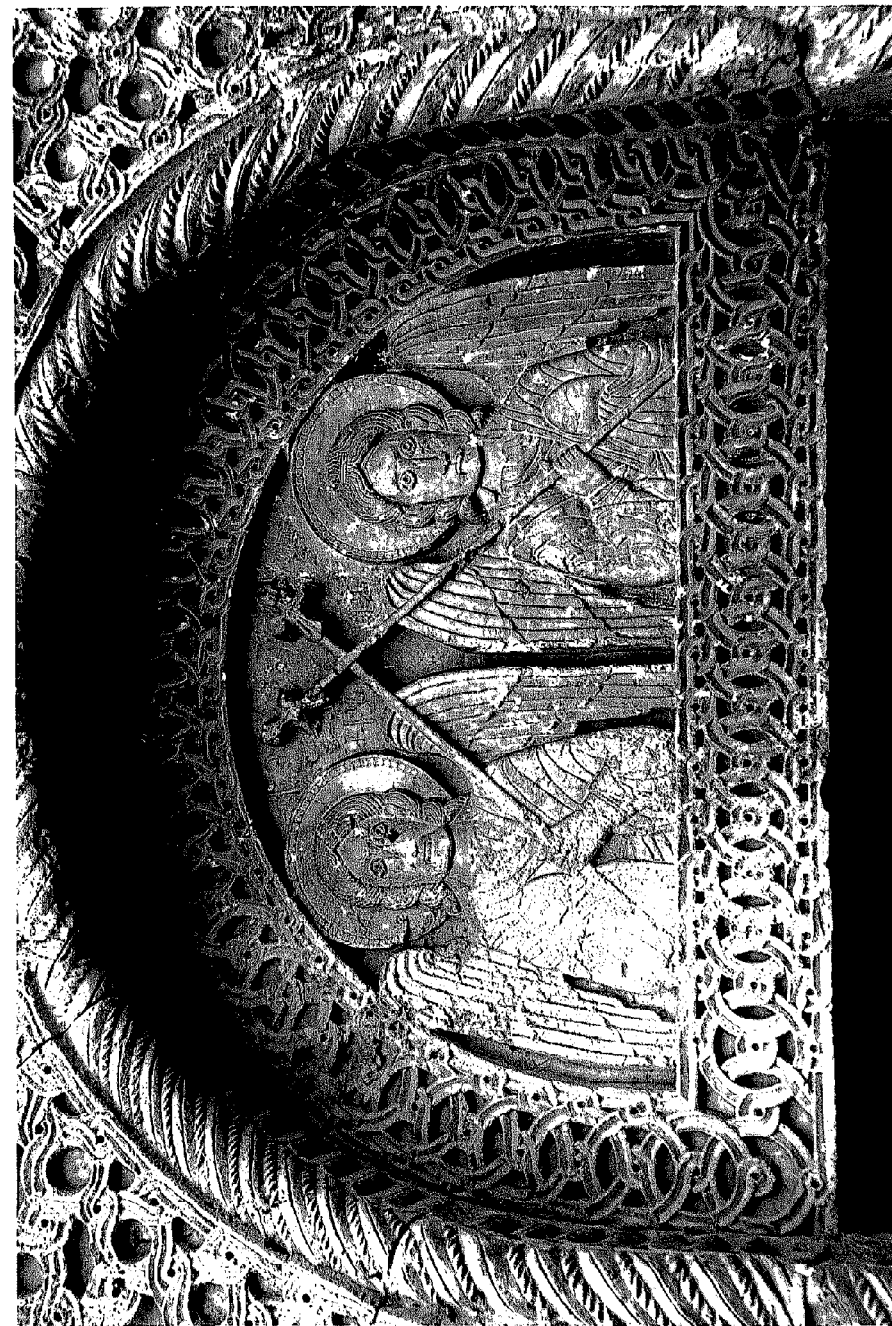


Fig. 75. Église de Nikor'minda. Tympan nord. Archanges.

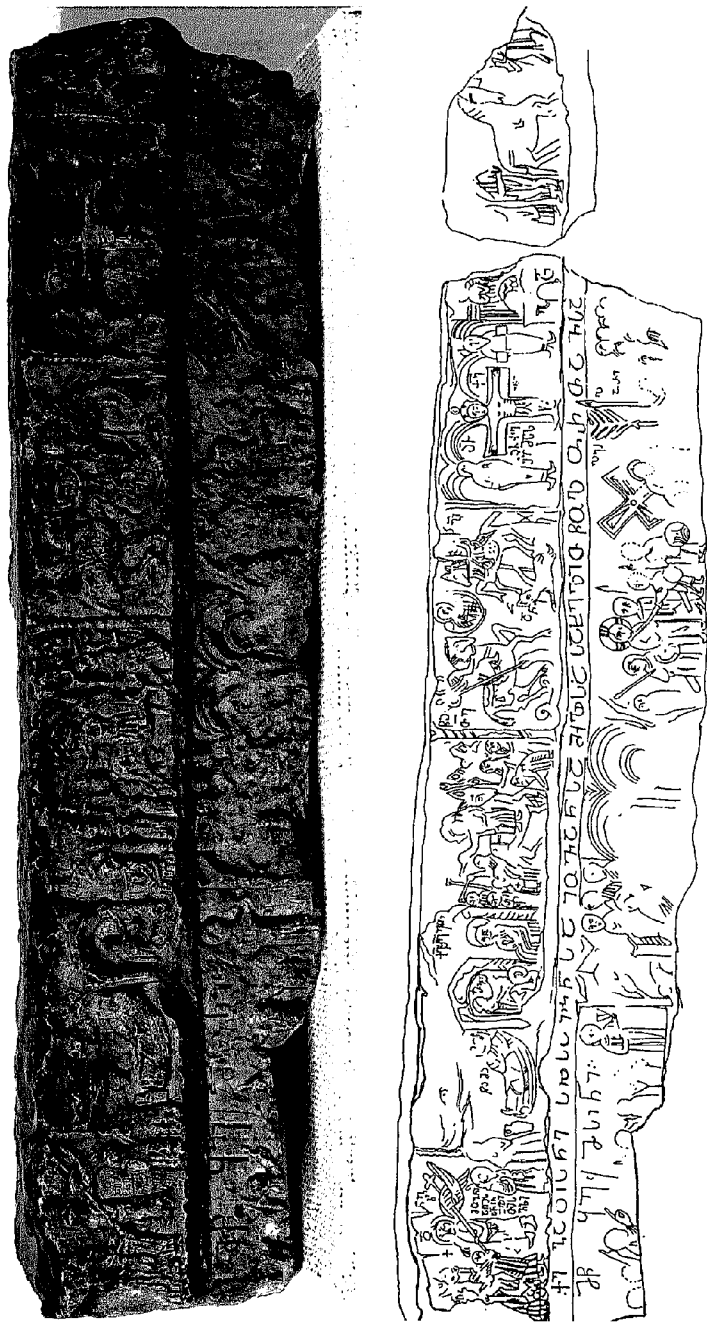


Fig. 81-82. Plaque d'Iq'alt'o.

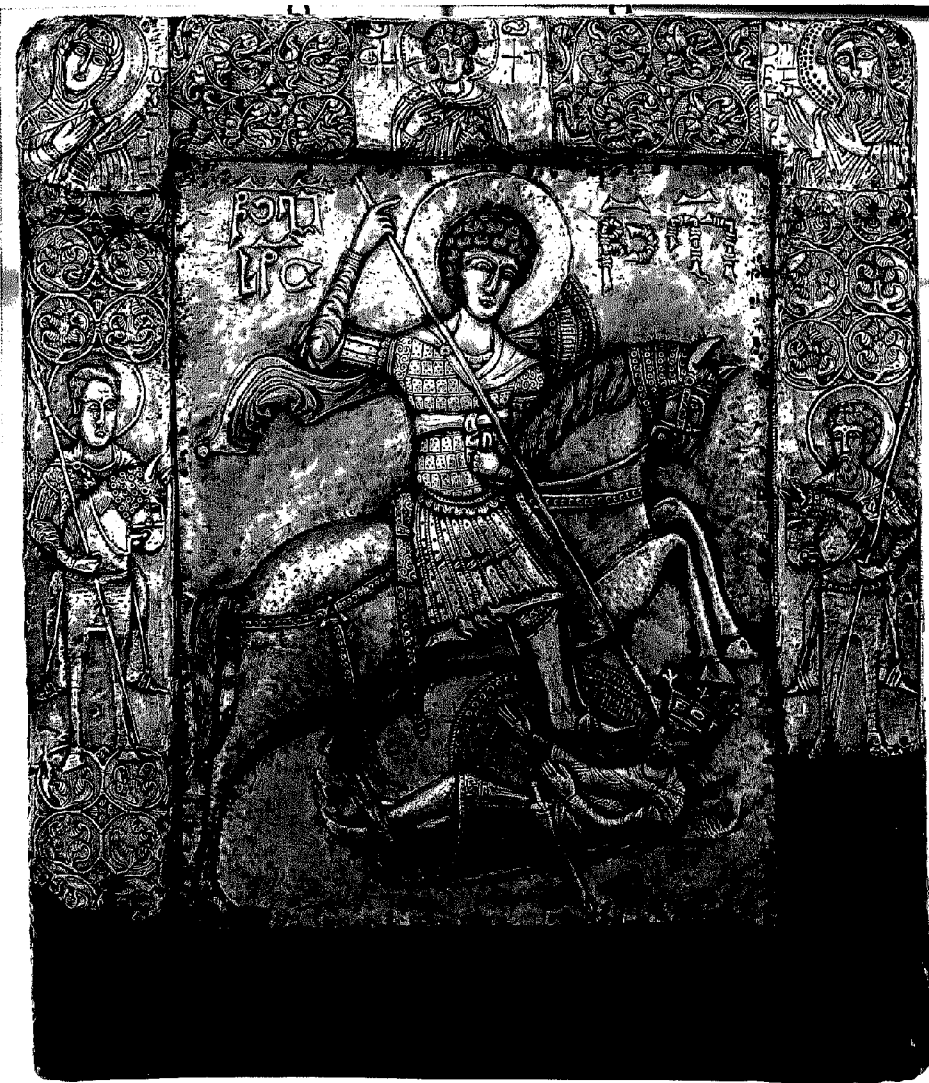


Fig. 83. Icône de Set'i.



Fig. 84. Icône de Nakip'ari. Œuvre d'Asan, commandé par Maruši.